

“He Who Opens a School Door...”

Educational Barriers and Opportunities for People with Felony Records

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Financial Aid

- People with felony records may access federal financial aid.
- Can apply using online FAFSA document
- Often qualify for Pell Grant due to lack of income.
 - Most qualify for \$5500 per year, when newly released.
 - Only applicable to undergraduate programs.
 - Pell Grant may be available for 12 semesters total.
<http://studentaid.ed.gov/types/grants-scholarships/pell>
- Are also eligible for federal loans
 - Subsidized and unsubsidized if they are enrolling in undergraduate programs.
 - Graduate programs only qualify for unsubsidized.

Barriers

- What disqualifies a person from student loans?
 - If they were convicted of a drug felony WHILE receiving federal student aid.
 - There are exceptions. For example, if the person completes an accepted drug or alcohol counseling program they may regain eligibility.
<http://ifap.ed.gov/eannouncements/attachments/011112StudentAidEligibilityDrugWkshten1213.pdf>
 - If they are currently in default with the Department of Education
 - If they contact the Department of Education, they may be able to enroll in a repayment program and be eligible again after 6 months.
<http://studentaid.ed.gov/repay-loans/default/get-out>
 - In some cases they have maxed out their benefits
 - They may have not registered for the Selective Service
 - If they were incarcerated during their required registry ages (18-25), they can provide the Selective Service with that documentation and get an exception. <http://www.sss.gov/Status.html>

How to pick a school?

- Many people were offered courses and education while incarcerated
 - Some of these were not finished due to being moved between facilities or due to cuts.
 - For these people, they may want to complete these courses.
 - Some are looking to build upon degrees, e.g. get a Bachelors degree in a field where they already have an Associates degree.
- Schools like Ivy Tech University will assess scholastic ability using standardized instrument. Ivy Tech uses the Compass Test.
- Most new students choose a program that can improve their job opportunities.
 - Encouraged to look into fields that are “felony friendly.”
 - Welding, construction, HVAC, barbering, etc.
 - Can receive certification in these areas through agencies, and may be funded by federal aid or programs like WorkOne.

Potential Pitfalls

- Lack of access to transportation, housing, computers, and internet may make attending school difficult for students
 - These concerns may be partially addressed by financial aid, but students may be overly burdened by the increased debt.
- Potential students can be preyed upon by so called for-profit colleges
 - May start getting phone calls, emails, and text messages after registering on job sites.
 - May not be prepared to be assertive enough to refuse offers.
 - Can be difficult to withdraw from the courses.
 - Most of these programs are more expensive, and harder to complete, than non-profit schools.

“... closes a prison.”

Victor Hugo